

ESQUIRE

F O R T N I G H T L Y

Knoxville Firm Buys Control, Plans Revamp

By James L. Rowe Jr.

NEW YORK—Esquire magazine was sold over the weekend to the 13-30 Corporation, a Knoxville-based publishing firm that got its start 10 years ago when two young University of Tennessee alumni put out a student guide to Knoxville.

The sale put editor Clay Felker out of a job again, after Felker had given his stock to his partner, Associated Newspapers Ltd., in return for more funds to keep the ailing magazine going.

Felker suffered a similar blow in 1978, when Australian publishing magazine publisher Murdoch bought New

York magazine out from under him. At that time, Felker vowed "What happened with New York will never happen again."

The new managers of Esquire are Phillip Moffit, 32, and Chris Whittle, 31, and they will become, respectively, editor and publisher. The buying price was not released.

Moffit and Whittle began their publishing careers with "Knoxville in a Nutshell," a student guide that circulates in 115 cities today and is among the largest college magazines in circulation, with 1.2 million copies distributed free on campuses. The 13-

'Esquire' Sold Again; Buyers Planning A Revamp

ESQUIRE, From B1

30 Corp., which aims its publications at readers in the 13-to-30 age group, is half owned by Ahlen & Akerlund, a Swedish publishing company in turn-

ed owned by the Bonnier family, producer of several morning dailies in that country. 13-30 also publishes several youth magazines for firms such as the Ford Motor Co. and Nikon.

At a press conference yesterday, the new owners were vague about what prompted them to buy Esquire—although they said they had been ready to do so when Felker snapped it up in 1977—and not much more specific about what changes the magazine might undergo.

They did, however, promise a return to a monthly format and a price rise from \$1.25 to \$1.50.

"Today's 25- to 45-year-old man" has been abandoned by the media, the new owners said in a press release, and 13-30 Corp. promised to fill that void with its version of a "fashionable literate publication." Whittle also promised a "commentary from women about men" as a regular feature.

While praising most of the changes Felker introduced, Moffitt and Whittle said they had a \$5 million kitty with which to make further improvements in the magazine over the next two years.

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was worth, although informed sources speculated that the Knoxville company was offering between \$3 million and \$4 million.

Associated Newspapers and its chairman, Vere Harmsworth, retained an interest in the magazine of something less than third.

Felker, meanwhile, had a "sort of Last-Supper lunch" with staffers last Friday, at which he promised he "would rise again in the magazine industry," according to a friend.

A letter from Felker, released at the press conference yesterday, said he was handing over a magazine that is "on the upswing in every way" and promised an announcement about his plans in the near future. Felker did not return a reporter's phone call.

Felker's friend said that until he finds a new niche in the magazine business, Felker will continue to work as an idea man for 20th Century Fox, suggesting movie plots, and will also devote some time to a small community newspaper he owns in Northern California.

What prompted Harmsworth to sell Esquire is not clear, but sources said a major factor was the British company's "inability" to write off Esquire's

losses against its taxes. The company said formally that Esquire did not "form part of its future U.S. investment strategy."

During Felker's term at Esquire, he redesigned the graphics of the magazine, brought many New York magazine writers to the publication and changed it from a monthly to a bi-weekly. He hyped up the masculine image of "The Magazine for Men" with the slogan, "It's all right to be a man again." When times got tough a few months ago, he gave his 51 percent share to Associated Publishers in a last-ditch attempt to keep the magazine afloat.

Felker and Associated Newspapers bought Esquire in 1977. Felker had formerly been editor of the Village Voice as well as New York, while the British firm numbered among its holdings the Soho Weekly, a major Voice competitor, as well as the London Daily Mail.

Esquire, which was founded in 1933 by Arnold Gingrich, attracted some of America's top authors from the very start, and continued to attract them through its change of ownership. Appearing in the magazine were works by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Norman Mailer, Helen Lawrence and Ernest Hemingway.